

# KINDLING THE CHRISTMAS FIRE

BY ORVILLE A. PETTY









KINDLING THE CHRISTMAS FIRE



# KINDLING THE CHRISTMAS FIRE

ORVILLE A. PETTY

THE PILGRIM PRESS

BOSTON

CHICAGO



COPYRIGHT, 1929  
SIDNEY A. WESTON



TO S. K. P.



## CONTENTS

	PAGE
KINDLING THE CHRISTMAS FIRE . . . . .	1
THE HEART OF A CHILD . . . . .	2
THE KING'S BIRTHDAY LIST . . . . .	4
UNRECOGNIZED . . . . .	5
THE FIRST CAROL . . . . .	6
OUR CHRISTMAS BELLS . . . . .	7
WHEN DOES CHRISTMAS BEGIN? . . . . .	9
SANTA CLAUS . . . . .	10
LABELED AND LOST . . . . .	11
ONCE A YEAR . . . . .	12
DEAR OLD YEAR . . . . .	13
TOGETHER ON THE THRESHOLD . . . . .	14
ETERNAL LIAISON . . . . .	15
WHEN THE STARS FIGHT FOR YOU . . . . .	16
PLAYING CHRIST . . . . .	17
AUTUMN . . . . .	18
THE FROZEN BROOK . . . . .	19
FAITH . . . . .	21
ANOTHER? . . . . .	22
THE MOUNTAIN . . . . .	23



## KINDLING THE CHRISTMAS FIRE

When years grow old and nights are bold,  
And hearths are grey with ash of care;  
When wolds are rolled in powdered cold  
And frost and fears are everywhere;  
Collect the moonbeams soft and shy,  
And living sparks from midnight sky,  
Catch faith from days that cannot die;  
Corral the glow of shining snow,  
With glint of glitt'ring spears that grow,  
And light of eyes that love and know  
The end of stories yet untold,  
And mingle with this blaze of gold  
The hope repentant sunbeams hold;  
Add fragrant myths from foreign shore,  
And fan with songs of mystic lore;  
Heap customs quaint from days of yore  
Against the clog of moral dross,  
And to its flaming laughter toss  
The broken ends of gain and loss, —  
And, when they sing like throbbing strings  
Which speak the love of sacred lyre, —  
Where shadows cling glad radiance rings !  
You've kindled bright the Christmas fire !

## THE HEART OF A CHILD

Into a world where faith was lost,  
Detained by lure of shrine and creed,  
Where love in dreary lines embossed  
Reposed in crypt of caste and greed,  
Life's Pioneer re-blazed the way,  
With thrilling hopes for lives beguiled,  
And joy for homeless far astray, —  
Ever unclaimed! — in the heart of a child!

Providing playgrounds in his heart  
A childhood brought to budding mind.  
These children grown repaid the start,  
In tender terms his birth defined.  
The festal scenes of foreign shore  
Around these songs and stories filed;  
We see through hazy lanes of lore  
Christmas is only the heart of a child!

The child with glad, heroic trust,  
Unspoiled by pride or cynic sneer,  
So free from dust and rust and lust,  
And simple, sweet, serene, sincere,  
Approaches life with open mind  
Where faith and doubt are reconciled,  
And fact and hope are all entwined; —  
Christmas abides in the heart of a child!

Our birdlings rise on fancy's wing,  
Above the facts they float along;  
Into the truth they soar and sing  
Beyond the marts of care and wrong.  
About their hearts begins the sky,  
In zones of light and breezes mild  
They *are* what later dreams imply;  
Heaven's asleep in the heart of a child!

The child has made the mother's heart,  
The home reclaims the heavy task,  
Our friends are worth the noble part  
They help us play by what they ask;  
Invited by a growing soul,  
Man's wrinkled face grew soft and smiled,  
And Christmas keeps to icy pole;  
Finding ourselves in the heart of a child!



## THE KING'S BIRTHDAY LIST

A harried king each year by custom pressed  
To make his honor-list for the bequest,  
Approached his birthday-dawn (the fifty-first)  
Through hours of feeble sleep with mind athirst.

A vision rose against his gloom and shone  
In tapered, awesome state about his throne.  
And, then, the vacant seat was strangely filled  
By peasant — sage or saint? — of kingly build.  
“Usurper bold! and yet so gently planned!”  
A white and thorn-scratched brow, and wounded hand!  
Not quite a stranger, all — and yet unknown!  
A childhood glimpse, perhaps, but early flown.  
He held *his* birthday-list upon his knee,  
Before him stood the worthy — only Three!

A Child whose *faith* held true when parent's fell  
Before sham, fear and hate, — shadows of hell!  
A Youth whose *hope* fared on when statesmen quit  
In quibbling compromise; the shame of it!  
A Saint whose *love* aglow in poverty,  
Undimmed by age or fate, chose ecstasy!

When Birthday-Morning came, the Dream-List won;  
The King remembered *all*; the Thing was done!

## UNRECOGNIZED

The Spirit of Christmas  
In humble guise  
Left the ways of Paradise,  
And under the roof  
Of icy skies  
Walked the streets of Merchandise.

Jostled and pushed by the  
Gift-buying throng,  
A stranger to all  
Who hurried along,  
Only bells were his friends  
As they broke into song.

Some whom he met  
Could not buy or bestow;  
The "missed" make it hard  
For *any* to know  
The Spirit of Christmas  
Where selfish winds blow.

The street was so cold, —  
Lest the multitude freeze  
Though wrapped in the splendor  
Of elegant ease,  
He named himself — "One  
Of the least of these."

## THE FIRST CAROL

Jewish shepherds on the wold  
Keeping flocks for sacrifice —  
Woven starlight for a fold,  
Caught a vision from the skies.

With no shining shield or spear,  
Lo! an army stood above,  
Giving peace the place of fear,  
By a battle song of love.

Savior, Shepherd, Prophet, Brother,  
Slept beneath the morning star,  
And in cattle-stall his mother  
Heard the carol from afar!

## OUR CHRISTMAS BELLS

Our Christmas is a spirit and a day!  
'Tis not an explanation stern and cold,  
But rhapsodies of love — a simple lay  
Like artless songs angelic choirs unfold:  
Not some demented season, growing old,  
A birthday, rather, starting in the night,  
And lasting on until the bells of gold  
Robe tardy dawn in tones of laughing light!

Our Christmas is an echo and a hope!  
'Tis not a treasured doctrine to be kept,  
But memories of childhood's blessed scope  
As into it God's mother-love has crept:  
No, not a restless, cheap desire, clean-swept  
Of all the notes a selfless soul can sing,  
But yearnings wholly like the heart that leapt  
Where first the Christmas bells began to ring.

Our Christmas is a gift-time and response, —  
And not some selfish scheme of crafty lease!  
Such gentle sharefulness as will ensconce  
The sad, bewildered heart in Jesus' peace.  
Some gifts are made accomplishing decrease  
Of rugged traits and true! The heavens elect  
To ring in weary lives, till failures cease,  
The clear but mellow chimes of self-respect!

Our Christmas is the message "All is well!"  
But not the hasty claim "The goal is won!"  
The steeple songs of cold December tell  
Of justice yet, with the returning sun!  
Not doles of mercy stale for deeds undone!  
The years expand the cause which right impels,  
A peace of brotherhood is well begun, —  
Our Father's love is heard in Christmas bells!

## WHEN DOES CHRISTMAS BEGIN?

When it's whispered that Christmas is near  
Has it really begun in the heart?  
As we wonder and hunger and peer,  
Has the Yule-tide been given a start?

Christmas eve, at midnight or dawn,  
Shall we reckon by gifts and the feast?  
Can the tints of its margins be drawn  
Where the selfish desire is released?

Candles low and the guests far away;  
Tireless memories surge in the soul,  
Where the echoes of sacrifice stray,  
Shall we here its beginnings enroll?

Does our Christmas begin when it's here  
By the calendar, hope or refrain?  
There are ports on the dream-bordered mere—  
Timeless romances richer than gain.

## SANTA CLAUS

Who can tell where Santa was born?  
Only knaves would scare him away!  
Who accounts for names he has worn  
Or his charms that never decay?  
He was found when ages forlorn  
On doorstep espied him alone.  
Empty homes may echo with scorn  
His spell and his value to own,  
Still the hearts where children have room  
Soon begin to claim the unknown, —  
Often truth will spring into bloom  
Where dream-seeds of fancy are blown.



## LABELED AND LOST

In thoughtless pride, when Christmas came,  
To costly gifts I fixed my name;  
And thus two hearts were led astray  
And twice we robbed the sacred day  
Of warmth and light and tuneful rhyme;  
For when again 'twas Christmas time,  
The labeled gift said, "Pass it back,  
You dare not grateful valor lack!"  
Another time, at Christmas dawn  
A nameless gift said, "Pass it on!"

## ONCE A YEAR

I never dream 'cept Christmas time,  
And don't you think it very queer,  
Though into bed each night I climb,  
I only dream but once a year?

I can't make out why it should be  
That in my sleep I never know  
Or even just begin to see  
Those "pretty things that come and go."

The dreams papa and mother tell,  
'Tis awful strange I never saw!  
They miss the things I see so well —  
Old Santa's sleigh which reindeers draw.

And toys I never saw before  
And such a load of sweets to eat!  
You wouldn't want a morsel more —  
So many things, — I can't repeat.

I guess it's 'cause I'm sound asleep  
So early that I'm half-way back,  
— Tho' still I long to take a peep —  
When Santa creeps down with his pack!

## DEAR OLD YEAR!

Comrade creative! Thy values abide  
And thy visions new secrets enfold;  
We dare to go on, attempt the untried  
With a guidance that never grows old!

Daring bells cannot ring thee away,  
Who providest them tongues and their song,  
And the rhythm the ringers obey,  
And the impulse that sweeps them along.

Endless old year! Thy heritage rare  
Gives a footing and meaning to time.  
Proud and thoughtless to-morrows will share  
The fund of thy savings sublime.

Thy sunlight and shadows, weakness and  
strength,  
Are all threads of eternity's gold;  
Our success must be woven at length  
From the margins thy yesterdays hold.

'Tis twelve! We must part! Yet the day  
Will find thee "on duty" right here!  
O soul of the truth! We *are* if you stay!  
Good-night, — but no more — my Old Year!

## TOGETHER ON THE THRESHOLD

We stand together on the threshold,  
My Soul and God and Another Year!  
Our secrets are one though yet untold, —  
For love appointed our meeting here.

My Soul's aglow and aflame with dawn  
Which tints the vestibule of Time;  
The year to come and the year that's gone  
Tremble together in tryst sublime.

A step to the throbbing steeple-song,  
"As ever!" with God, the Year is New!  
Into my heart life-meanings throng;  
God! The New Year! O my Soul, *they* are true!

## ETERNAL LIAISON

The new in the old and the old in the new  
Are often the data that searchers eschew.  
The gold in the dross and the ore with the gold  
Are not in the dream that the prospectors hold.  
The soil in the seed and the stubble for soil  
Are lost in the thrust of the pioneer's foil.  
Return to "behavior" and run with the pack,  
Or furrow t'ward heaven and never look back,  
Admire and evaluate the golden age gone,  
Or sally the king while we castle a pawn!  
The problem of life? To be *bold*, — and to hold  
The old in the new and the new in the old.

## WHEN THE STARS FIGHT FOR YOU

Did the stars once fight for Israel  
When Sisera's frantic warriors fell?  
So lines of an ancient ballad tell!

This host that flees at hint of day?  
These fugitive tapers wan and gray?  
Yet, stars no comrade e'er betray!

Did the morning stars together sing,  
And swaddled world in the rapture swing?  
Who, then, is the soul remembering!

These random keys of light unstrung?  
These spalls across the heaven flung?  
But, fires on my hearth have found a tongue!

Is the voice of stars a battle song?  
Where does the fire in my heart belong?  
Neither hearth nor heaven favors wrong!

## PLAYING CHRIST

Saint Francis tried it  
In the Apennines;  
*Renouncing* the world; —  
His stigmatized hands!

Oberammergau vied it  
Rehearsing its lines,  
*Inviting* the world; —  
Shrine of all lands!

Our stage has belied it,  
The cost it declines,  
*Approving* the world; —  
Commercialized bands!

No curtains to hide it!  
No bright urging signs!  
*Approaching* the world, —  
An empty stage stands!



## AUTUMN

Edge-of-Summer etched with frost,  
Touched with sunshine tinged with cold,  
Laced with shadows long and lost,  
Milled by burrs the wind-gods mould.

Polestar pales in Northern Light,  
Midday skies cyanic grow,  
Sunset snatches sunrise glow,  
Woodlands reel in xanthic plight.

Gem-fires race on borrowed time,  
Endless spectrums burn the sod.  
Tinted dolor dream of Rhyme!  
Hinted color scheme of God!

## THE FROZEN BROOK

From the Sea toward thy Home  
Far away by the Hill,  
The ice-shackles grip Thee  
In darkness, — not still!  
For the song of thy courage  
Surges and swings, —  
Like 'pipes of Highlanders,  
Battling with Kings!

Down on the Lowlands  
Invasion began.  
There the Cold bridged Thee, —  
With pontoons that span  
Freedom of Movement  
And access to Light —  
Attacking with lances,  
Advancing at Night!

O'errun, yet unwon!  
Friend Sun, distant, cold,  
North Wind abetting,  
Old Winter grew bold,  
First seizing thy Pools,  
Thy Rapids aring  
Called on King Zero!  
Half-won to thy Spring!

Here they were halted,  
    *Heart* staying their blast:  
Breath of hope rising,  
    The crisis was passed!  
Still true to its Goal  
    Thy Soul quite ice-free,  
Fights on for its right,  
    And sings toward thy Sea!

## FAITH

As substitute for thought,  
Our essence is denied!  
No strength of self is caught  
Adrift on ebbing tide!  
As course across the wave  
For better ports of rest  
It dares the shifting grave; —  
Our faith is doubt at best!  
As explorer its hold  
Upon reality  
Is *ideas* faring, bold  
Into totality.  
While voyaging for truth,  
As transient port attained,  
A rest should not bring ruth;  
Life-meanings are sustained.

## ANOTHER?

— So all day long I rowed  
    against the storm,  
And when I snapped an oar,  
    then came the fog!  
Perhaps, my course was bowed,  
    so far away  
I seemed to be from shore  
    as night drew near.

And then I called once —  
    or was it twice?  
There followed clear and plain,  
    a voice like mine!  
In doubt, am I a dunce  
    to gain repose?  
Friend, echo or refrain  
    shall I maintain?

I left a shore, — this hope,  
    or another? —  
So long ago, half-spent  
    is *memory*!  
Though I called, the scope  
    of sea between,  
“Off shore” lies, and is lent  
    Eternally!

## THE MOUNTAIN

Margins of uncertainty  
    surround  
So many great things  
    in our quest!  
Mist and morass are  
    not the bound  
Of all life's meaning  
    coalesced!  
Beyond the bog and fog  
    we long to climb  
What we assume, that values  
    may command,  
(Spaceless space disturbs like  
    timeless time,)  
Unseen upthrust of that  
    on which we stand!  
When generous storm  
    our tree-tops tossed,  
We glimpsed a slope, perhaps,  
    cloud-bound, unclear;  
Did echo come? We tried  
    to call when lost!  
Is mystery a shadow  
    or a fear?

When we employ the whole  
that we may live  
We presuppose, by all  
we understand,  
A lofty Other, and  
sanely give  
Quality of that  
*on which we stand!*









